

## Island hopping in Croatia

Autor Chuck Norris  
Wednesday, 28 May 2008

### Island hopping in Croatia

Croatia's varied islands offer everything from sailing to skinny dipping, isolated beaches to 24-hour parties

Jane Foster  
guardian.co.uk,  
Wednesday May 21 2008  
Article history

Unspoilt nature ... Mljet island National Park in South Dalmatia. Photograph: Hemis/Corbis

With over a thousand islands, islets and reefs, of which 66 are inhabited, the Croatian islands offer everything from nudist beaches to windsurfing, and organic wines to all-night dance parties. You can bed down in a boutique hotel or a back-to-basics cottage (no running water, no mains electricity), depending on your pain threshold. It's also outside the eurozone so your holiday cash will go a bit further.

1. Best for local food and wine: Vis

Vis island seen from Hvar. Photograph: Jane Foster A Yugoslav military naval base and a no-go zone for foreigners until 1989, Vis was invaded by yachties the moment the last submarine left. Now a hippy-chic summer hideaway, its informal konobe (taverns) serve Dalmatian seafood dishes. At Mola Trovna, Senko Karuza takes guests on fishing trips then shows you how to clean and cook your catch. Don't miss Vis's organic wines - white Vugava and red Mali Plavac - and rogacica, a potent tippie made from carob, which grows in abundance here.

Stay at the 12-room Hotel Paula, in a cobbled side street in Vis Town, doubles &euro;106 (£85). More information on Vis: [tz-vis.hr](http://tz-vis.hr)

2. Best for name-dropping: Hvar

Hvar harbour. Photograph: Jane Foster Centring on Venetian-era Hvar Town, Croatia's most fashionable island destination warrants exploring beyond its capital's 16th-century fortifications. Leave the design hotels and chichi cocktail bars behind to hike or mountain bike through a rugged landscape of silvery-purple lavender fields and the hillside vineyards that produce velvety red Plavac. Or dodge the celebrity-spotters on the palm-lined seafront promenade to take a sea-kayaking trip round the nearby Pakleni islets.

Stay at Palmizana, an upmarket bohemian retreat, with bungalows and villas painted in bold colours and decorated with contemporary Croatian art, set in lush gardens on the island of Palmizana, a 10-minute boat ride from Hvar town. Doubles &euro;60-100 (£48-80) (minimum stay one week), book through [i-escape.com](http://i-escape.com). More information on Hvar: [hvar.hr](http://hvar.hr)

3. Best for back-to-basics: Kornati archipelago

The Kornati archipelago is a scattering of 89 islands, islets and reefs, which has been designated a national park. There's no fresh water here, and the islands are rocky and arid. In the past, their scanty vegetation was used for summer grazing, and shepherds and fishermen from Murter built stone cottages to use as seasonal accommodation. With a nod to sustainable tourism, several of these dwellings are now available to rent for a no-frills, environmentally friendly holiday.

Stay in a fisherman's cottage, with water from a well, low-voltage solar electricity, and an outdoor shower and barbecue. Expect to pay &euro;80 (£64) a day for a house sleeping two (transport there and back included). Book through Lori Tourist Agency. More information: [kornati.hr](http://kornati.hr)

4. Best for water sports: Brac

Zlatni Rat, on Brac's south coast, is Croatia's most photographed beach, and its top windsurfing spot. The nearby fishing village of Bol may have succumbed to multi-lingual menus and a miniature-train, but it remains a haven for water sports enthusiasts. Besides windsurfing, Zlatni Rat offers scuba diving, sea kayaking, parasailing, water skiing, jet skiing and wakeboarding. For the uninitiated, pedal boats provide a taster.

Stay at the five-room Villa Giardino, set in a pretty garden and furnished with antiques in Bol. Doubles &euro;100 (£80). More information: [bol.hr](http://bol.hr)

5. Best for unspoilt nature: Mljet (South Dalmatia)

Through the centuries, Mljet remained something of a backwater, its dense pine forests encroaching on its pair of interconnected emerald-green saltwater lakes. In fact, little on record ever happened here, but for the arrival (1151) and departure (1345) of a group of Italian Benedictine monks who built an Apulian-Romanesque monastery on an islet on the larger of the two lakes, and the introduction of a family of Indian mongooses (1910) intended to wipe out Mljet's snake population (which they did). While the western, forested part of Mljet is now a national park, the eastern coast hosts a lovely sand beach, Saprunara.

Stay at the six-room Villa Mirosa, close to Saprunara beach. Doubles &euro;66 (£53). More information: [np-mljet.hr](http://np-mljet.hr)

6. Best for nudists: Rab

Many pinpoint the birth of nudism in Croatia to summer 1936, when Rab's local authorities granted King Edward VIII and Mrs Simpson permission to swim naked at Kandarola beach. But it's not just about no-knickers. Rab Town is a charming huddle of medieval stone buildings, grouped on a fortified peninsular, lined with four elegant Romanesque church bell-towers. And on Rab's northern tip, Lopar peninsular hosts some of Croatia's best sand beaches (several textile-option).

Stay at the 14-room Pansion Tamaris in Palit - regular taxi-boats leave Palit's promenade for Kandarola nudist beach. Doubles &euro;96 (£77) (half-board). More information: [tzg-rab.hr](http://tzg-rab.hr)

7. Best for learning to sail: Murter

Murter almost touches the mainland, to which it is joined by a 12m drawbridge. Its proximity to the scattered islets and reefs of Kornati National Park makes it a favourite base for yachters. Each summer, the Adriatic Nautical Academy (ANA) runs a sailing school here in Jezera. Courses at various levels last seven days and include early morning wake-up, plenty of sailing practice, and afternoon theory lessons (instruction in English).

Stay at the ANA summer sailing school, where a one-week course costs &euro;505 (£404) (includes accommodation, either on school premises or aboard a boat). More information: [tzo-murter.hr](http://tzo-murter.hr)

8. Best beach parties: Pag

Long renowned for its delicious Paski sir (Pag cheese), made from sheep's milk, Pag is now also Croatia's top spot for summer beach clubs. As of 2007, Zrce beach, near Novalja, is the only place in the country where bars and clubs are granted 24-hour licences. Long summer days end with after-beach-parties at Kalypso, Papaya and Aquarius, transforming into full-on dance clubs after dark, hosting international DJs such as Joe Montana, Tiesto and Armand van Helden.

Stay at the 35-room Hotel Loza on the seafront in Novalja. Doubles &euro;99-129 (£79-103). More information: [pag-tourism.hr](http://pag-tourism.hr)

9. Best for extreme isolation: Palagruza

Rising up in the middle of the Adriatic Sea, roughly halfway between Italy and Croatia, you'll find wild little Palagruza. There are no buildings, but for an elegant lighthouse dating back to 1875, perched on the island's highest point. From here, footpaths zig-zag down to two fine pebble beaches, Stara Vlaka and Veli Zal, with shallow water ideal for kids.

Stay at Palagruza lighthouse, in one of two two-bedroom apartments. Doubles &euro;100 (£80) (minimum stay one week). Bring one-week's food supply &ndash; there are no deliveries here, though you can often buy fresh fish from the lighthouse keeper.

10. Best day trip from the mainland: Lopud

La Villa hotel, Lopud. Photograph: Jane Foster  
Tiny, car-free Lopud makes a peaceful escape from touristy Dubrovnik. Its sole settlement (population 269) is built around a gently curving bay, while a 15-minute trek across the island through dense, herb-scented vegetation brings you to the lovely Sunj sandy beach. You can reach Lopud from Dubrovnik by ferry in 50 minutes or by the summer-only speedboat in 30 minutes. And, come sunset, if you don't feel like returning to city life, there are several small, family-run hotels, where you might chance upon a spare room.

Stay at the six-room La Villa, overlooking Lopud Bay, book through [i-escape.com](http://i-escape.com). Doubles &euro;90-110 (£72-88) (standard), &euro;130-153 (£104-123) (superior). More information: [visitdubrovnik.hr](http://visitdubrovnik.hr)

- Prices are for two persons sharing double room, B&B, in high season (Aug).

- Jane Foster is the author of the Footprint Croatia Handbook, 4th edition due out in June 2008